

The Assam Tribune

House okays wildlife protection amendment Bill

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, July 16 – The State Assembly today passed the Wildlife (Protection) (Assam Amendment) Bill-2009, incorporating more stringent provisions to check wildlife crimes, including life term for poaching. The Bill (now an Act) has made first-time poaching a punishable offence by imprisonment from seven to ten years in place of the earlier provisions of three to seven years. For a second offence, the quantum of punishment will extend from ten years to life imprisonment.

Terming the day as a historic occasion for the State's wildlife lovers, Forest Minister Rockybul Hussain said that the Bill was drafted after pursuing the matter with the Centre, besides having wide-ranging discussions with wildlife experts, NGOs and members of the judiciary so that the legal loopholes in tackling wildlife crimes could be addressed.

AGP member Pradip Hazarika wanted the Bill to have provisions for preventing any human settlement within a radius of 200 metres of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks for checking encroachment and wildlife crimes in protected areas. He reasoned that growing human settlements by protected forests, besides encroachments, made it extremely easy for poachers to operate and decimate wildlife at will.

The minister, however, said that removing existing settlements within protected areas became much difficult following the enactment of the Centre's Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers' (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act-2006. "For instance, we are unable to relocate two forest villages inside Dibru-Saikhowa National Park even after having the necessary fund for the purpose. The villagers are against leaving the forest," he said.

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=jul1709/at09>